

**Excerpts Concerning the 1910 Fires as
Taken From a Congressional Report of July 15, 1911.**

The season of 1910 was the driest season in northern Idaho known to the oldest settlers. With the exception of a few light showers there was no rainfall in this region from April 1 to October 1, 1910.

On the Coeur d'Alene National Forest forest fires started burning in April and during the months of May and June they were numerous. Owing to the fact that the humus covering the ground had not yet thoroughly dried out, however, it was possible to extinguish all fires that occurred during these months. By the 15th of July with the dry weather continuing, conditions were extremely critical. Even though a fire was apparently extinguished a crew had to be kept continually on the fire line because the fire often smoldered underneath the ground and could not be fully extinguished. By this time numerous new fires were starting at various points throughout the forest every day. These were chiefly caused by sparks from railroad engines, settlers burning brush, careless smokers and campers.

On July 23rd a severe electrical storm, with practically no rain, passed over the region, setting numerous fires throughout the entire district. On the morning of July 24, special orders sent all rangers on the Forest looking for fires. On July 24, 25, and 26 nine of these lightning fires were extinguished. Five others, however, started by the same cause

in extremely inaccessible places far away from trails and roads, attained such proportions before crews of sufficient size could reach them that it was impossible to put them immediately under control. Many of these fires were in such inaccessible places that provisions had to be packed to the firefighters on men's backs until a horst trail could be cut within reach of the fire. This condition always weakened the firefighting force at the start when the heavy crew was most needed and would be most beneficial.

From this time on, practically every day brought news of new fires starting largely from brands blowing from the other fires. On August 13, Even though the nearest fire in a straight line was 6 miles from Wallace, numerous pieces of burning bark as large as a man's hand fell in the streets of Wallace and set awnings on fire in three different instances. This condition of course prevailed throughout the timbered areas within reach of all the fires.

By this time there were, besides two troops of soldiers about 1800 men fighting fires on the Coeur d'Alene Forest, and it was believed that everything was in good condition because fire lines had been established around practically all the fires and there is no question whatever that had the conditions been normal all of these fires could have been successfully stopped without any great loss.

On August 20, however, a heavy wind arose about noon, blowing toward the northeast, which brushed up all the fires to such an extent that it was impossible to hold them within the confines of the fire trenches dug around them. These fires

not only swept over the fire lines, but the stiff breeze that was blowing became intensified by the heat of the many fires untilⁱⁿ the fire region the wind attained hurricane proportions, scattering the fire to such an extent that new fires started in thousands of places, often following the tops of the trees for miles before it would meet some open country to stop it. These were the conditions which led to the loss of lives of firefighters and others.

All the firefighters were in charge of men who knew every trail, stream and open place in the region, but owing to the fact that the severe windstorm started up thousands of new fires within a short time it made little difference which direction the men were taken, as new fires were springing up all around them which made their escape impossible. Although the firefighters were distributed over the entire region from the head of the St. Joe to the head of the Coeur d'Alene River, a distance of 100 miles, the loss of life on Coeur d'Alene Forest occurred wholly within the area between Wallace and the St. Joe River where storm conditions seemed to be much worse than anywhere else.

Excerpts from 1910 newspaper clippings.

Mullan - August 22. Mullan spent a night of terror last night but emerged from the danger this morning without a building in town burned. That the whole city was not destroyed is entirely due to the courage and heroism of the men. All night long they fought the fires that surrounded the city on all sides. In many parts of the town fire came right down the hills to the rear of houses.

To save the town back fires were used, one being made from the main part of town to the Hunter mill. The fire was on both sides of Mill Creek, but the work of the men saved the mill.

Early in the afternoon it was known that Mullan was in danger and the order went out that men must stay. Armed with guns and clubs the police officers and specials kept the men in town who attempted to get away. A special train, however, carried out a number of wounded and injured firefighters from Boulder Creek.

Men who tried to get out on this train were told they would not be permitted to go and when they persisted they were treated in a manner that showed them they had better remain. A few caresses with huge clubs the officers carried was the most convincing argument.

The women and children were in great fear and they all spent a terrifying night. They expected every minute that the whole town would go and it was only after many hours of the hardest kind of labor that it was saved.

Mullan, August 22:- The most pitiful sight ever witnessed in Mullan occurred Sunday morning when 15 survivors of the Boulder Creek fire limped into town. All were staggering and all carried their arms in the air. They were badly burned and the only relief that could be obtained was by holding their hands up. Some of the men were blind from the flames that had burned them and these held on to the men in front of them. They walked in single file and made a most distressing spectacle.

One of the men had been left in the woods nearly dead. The injured men tried to bring him with them but he was exhausted

and so near dead that there was danger of all losing their lives if they remained with him. The men, after they were injured, carried him for some distance, but they finally were forced to leave him.

The men were caught between four different fires. They rushed through the blaze and it was then that they were first injured. In emerging from the first fire one was more badly burned than the others. It was necessary to continue through the flames again and the injured man was packed along. They carried him with them while the trees were falling around them, the red hot blasts of flame continually burning them. They took turns in carrying him, but at last the fire became so fierce that it was an utter impossibility to continue with him if they were not all to lose their lives. At the time he was left he was unconscious and believed very near death.

To escape the flames one of the men leaped over a 35-foot cliff. He sustained severe injuries besides his burns.

J. G. Dandelson, the forestry official in charge of the crew is deserving of the highest honors. Although he was badly injured he kept the men together and it is due to him that all but one escaped.

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A rough estimate of the fire loss in national forests of Montana and northern Idaho placed the total amount of timber killed or destroyed in this one district at over 6 billion board feet. At the time the estimate of damage was made (1910 - 1911) it was considered that the timber lost was equivalent to a money loss of \$15,000,000.

The heaviest losses were in two Idaho forests, the Coeur d'Alene, where over three billion board feet were reported killed or destroyed, and the Clearwater where one billion feet were lost. The Helena National Forest in Montana was thought to have lost 500 million feet; the Cabinet National Forest 400 million, and the Lolo Forest 300 million.

A large part of the losses on the Coeur d'Alene, Clearwater and Lolo Forests were due to what became practically one great fire. The burn is shown on Forest Service maps as extending in a northwesterly and southeasterly direction from north of Wallace, Idaho, to a point some 30 miles southwest of Missoula, Montana, or nearly 100 miles. At its widest point this burn has a width of about 40 miles, but its shape is very irregular.